

The Brook Stops Here

By TONY KELSO

West Brook winds its serpentine way from the watershed of North Hill to the salt marshes of the Back River. This hardy brook at one time or another in Duxbury's history has had many different names in its journey to the sea, suggesting many different personalities over the years.

The brook's water sources are the springs and former water meadows created by beavers. In the 17th century these prized grazing grounds were known as the North Hill meadows. From these sources to Route 14/West Street the brook was known as Malachi Brook for a time. This wonderful sounding Old

Testament name came from several generations of men named Malachi DeLano who had farms in the West Street area in the 18th

century. The long and beautiful North Hill pond is not a natural pond but was a damming of Malachi Brook for a sawmill that long-time Duxbury residents remember as Priest's mill. The waters of Malachi were later used for the Merry family cranberry bogs in the area.



The brook runs under Route 14 through a concrete culvert. But at one time around 1900, it "brawled out" into a shallow pool by the road and many a horse would stop there for a grateful drink. This was according to Dr. Alice Bigelow who wrote a fascinating column in the Clippers of the 1950s. She also tells a story of a man who grew up in a nearby house. He went on a holiday to Boston and on returning to his house from the Millbrook railroad station he gleefully flung into the brook all his remaining money, which was two cents. Dr. Bigelow's remembrance of what Malachi Brook was once like was an eloquent plea about these meandering streams. "They crossed our roads with their bright brown streams under brief wooden bridges. It was human nature to slow down and look over the railing, and there was often a reward in some interesting form of life. We felt their friendliness. The modern demands of swift heavy traffic have suppressed these streams, treating them like sewers. They have lost something of a sweet reality that should be theirs."

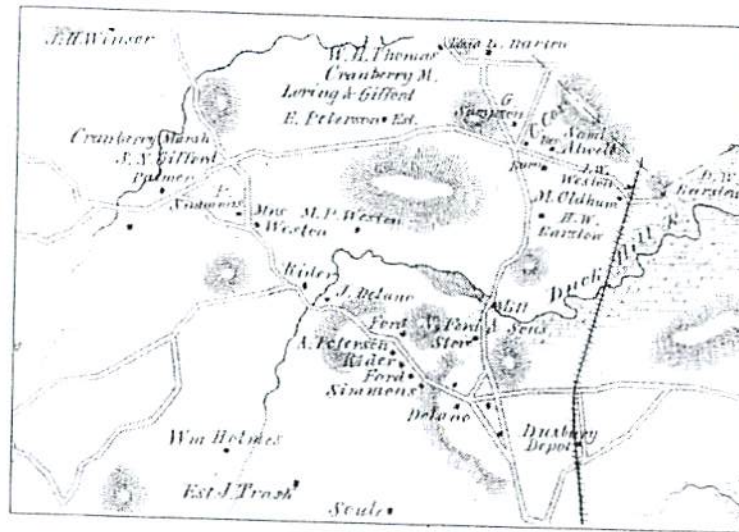
After Route 14 the stream was often referred to as West Brook. It is a debate whether West Street was named for the direction it heads in, or for the West family. The brook (which never flows west) and the street were bounds on the 17th century 40 acre farm of Francis West. West Brook then takes a gen-

the curve to the east through some wetlands that are now the fertile grounds of Duxbury's Damon wells. It soon fans out into Millpond just to the west of Route 3A/Tremont Street. After the gristmill for Duxbury was built at the site in 1637 this part of the brook became "Millbrook" and was the place where all Duxbury farmers took their grain to be ground. The name soon spread to the whole area bordering the brook. When the train tracks crossed the brook in 1871 and a station was made near St. George Street, the area around FarFar's ice cream shop we now associate with the name Millbrook was created.

Before 1637, Duxbury's first families called the brook Stony Brook because of the abundance of rocks in the streambed below or to the east of Route 3A. That name did not last long, though, once the mill was built and people naturally called it Millbrook.

Only in a few obscure early Duxbury records will you discover that the Native American name for the brook was "Nishamahoquanett." This name may refer to the herring or alewives that ran up the brook in the spring, even well into the 19th century. This seemingly insignificant brook was also the border between the Massachusetts band of natives and the Patuxet band of Wampanoag natives. It is only for this reason that the native name was recorded and preserved in the English records.

After slipping beneath Route 3A the brook waters begin to get brackish as they snake their way to the Back River. Here it picks up its final name, as it joins other streams at the foot of Duck Hill, and becomes the mighty (in salt



A map of 1879 shows West Brook winding through the Millbrook section of Duxbury.

marsh terms) Duck Hill River, one of the many salt water streams that make up the beautiful Back River marshes.

Today, thanks to the farsightedness of many groups like the town of Duxbury conservation commission, the Audubon Society and the Wildlands Trust, the waters of West Brook are unpolluted as they flow through protected lands. The final and vital link in this greenbelt, wildlife corridor and well protection area is the Jaycox tree farm property that the Duxbury Town Meeting will vote on purchasing on June 14.

So what's in a name? For West Brook, whether it's native, Old Testament, industrial or geological or geographic, the many names have meant a brook with personality.